Mark Schmanko
RELI/231
2:00PM - 2:50PM MWF DCH 1046

American Metaphysical Religions:
The History and Meaning of the "Spiritual but not Religious"

Course Description

Beginning with a historical survey of the American metaphysical tradition, this course turns to a close study of the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, as a unique window into the categories of mysticism, esotericism, and the development of the contemporary "Spiritual but not Religious" (SbnR) phenomenon. The course explores some of the different ways the SbnR phenomenon has appropriated Asian religions, psychological models of the unconscious, and contemporary scientific paradigms.

Course Goals:

- Provide a survey treatment of major groups, figures and thinkers in the historical currents that culminate in the "Spiritual but not Religious" phenomenon.
- Explore the interaction between the "Spiritual but not Religious" and relevant cultural themes such as psychology, science, popular culture and forms of orthodox religion.
- Expose the student to a selection of primary sources from authors within, or formative for, the "Spiritual but not Religious."
- Describe and analyze the development of religious plurality and hybridity in light of the American counterculture, the migration of South Asian communities and traditions to the West, and what historian Leigh Eric Schmidt (2005) calls 'American Spirituality.
- Introduce some of the prominent theories and theorists in this area of academic research.

Required Texts

Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion*, 2007.
Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality,* 2006.

*All remaining texts are either available online or will be uploaded as pdfs.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

Course Goals:

- Provide a survey treatment of major groups, figures and thinkers in the historical movement framed as American Metaphysical Religion.
- Explore the interaction between American Metaphysical Religion and relevant cultural themes such as South Asian traditions in the America, psychology, popular culture and forms of orthodox religion.
- Expose the student to a selection of primary sources from authors within, or formative for, American Metaphysical Religion.
- Introduce some of the prominent theories and theorists in this area of academic research.

I. Assignments

The student is expected to come to class with the reading assigned for the day completed and ready to be discussed. **Class participation** is a significant part of the grade. In order to ensure the reading has been completed and engaged, **ten reading responses** will be collected over the course of the semester. In addition, there will be a **midterm exam** on authors and texts read and discussed up to the date of the exam. Lastly, a final research project will consist of a **final paper of 10-15 pages** is required on a topic of the student's choosing relevant to the course. The paper may be historical, thematic, or ethnographic.

II. Grading:

Reading discussion and participation 30%
Five page reflection (midterm): 10%
Final paper (12-15 pages): 60%
Extra credit: up to 5 points

Grading Scale (%)
98+ (A+); 97.9-94 (A); 93.9-90 (A-); 89.9-87 (B+); 86.9-84 (B); 83.9-80 (B-); 79.9-77 (C+); 76.9-74 (C); 73.9-70 (C-); 69.9-67 (D+); 66.9-64(D); 63.9-60 (D-); 59.9-(F).

III. Attendance and Absences:

According Rice University policy, "Students are expected to attend all scheduled activities for all of the classes for which they are registered during the entire course of the academic semester for which they are enrolled." Instructors can make exceptions based upon the following: a) a university-sponsored event conflicts with the scheduled class. If that is the case, please notify me as far in advance as possible; b) absences for

activities that are not university-related may be negotiated with the Instructor on a case-by-case basis. Please notify me as far in advance as possible; c) in the case of illness, please notify me of your inability to attend the day's class in advance. If the student will miss more than two classes for an illness, please secure a note from a medical physician.

IV. Deadlines and Late Work

"No student should be given an extension of time or opportunities to improve a grade that are not available to all members of the class, except for verified illness or justified absence from campus." See Rice University guidelines here: http://professor.rice.edu/professor/grading_guidelines1.asp

To verify illness or justify another absence (primarily due to medical or family emergency), please send me an email in advance if possible. If not, please send the email as soon as possible thereafter. Extensions will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Otherwise all deadlines in this course are final. Late work will not be accepted.

V. Policy on Electronic Devices

It is highly recommend that students avoid the use of electronic equipment, but I will not prohibit its use. Many of the texts we will read this semester are available in electronic formats. I also understand many young students have taken notes on their laptop since childhood and cannot imagine doing so by another method. As such, electronic equipment will be allowed *unless* it becomes apparent it is being used to distract the student and those around them.

Please note that research by neurologists and cognitive-scientists has proven the old-fashioned pen-and-paper strategy of notation produces higher levels of retention, comprehension, and understanding. See for example: http://www.psychologicalscience.org/ index.php/news/releases/take-notes-by-hand-for-better-long-term-comprehension.html. The reason is quite simple: these devices are engineered to be distracting! Entire libraries of books, images, websites, videos, and games are at our fingertips waiting to be clicked.

VI. What to bring to class

To facilitate and ground our discussion of the reading, please bring all of the texts for the day to class. Electronic editions are permitted.

VII. Class preparation

The discussion of every class meeting will center on the assigned text(s) and reading-response questions. As such, it is imperative that both the reading and response have been completed prior to class. When everyone is prepared, seminars can become dynamic, intellectually ambitious forums for discussion. Each student benefits by sharing his or her insights, queries, and concerns with others, and hearing alike in turn.

VIII. Honor code
The Rice University Honor Code is available here: http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/. All students are required to abide by its honor system and by-laws.
In this class, those sections of the Honor Code referencing writing, plagiarism, citation, and paraphrasing are most pertinent. Given this is course intends to train students in practices of paraphrase, citation, and scholarly attribution, I will take an educational approach to such matters. That means I will take transgressions of these procedures as an opportunity for teaching and correction, rather than as instances of academic dishonesty. However, instances of repeat or egregious transgressions can and will be brought to the attention of the Rice Honor Council.

All writing you produce in this course must be your own. No collaboration on writing is permitted. Collaborations in reading, textual discussion, critiquing other students' writing, or revisions are strongly encouraged.

IX. ADA statement
If you have a documented disability and will be seeking academic adjustments or accommodations, please let me know during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Students with disabilities will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center. See https://dss.rice.edu/

X. Syllabus Agreement
I reserve the right to change any of the reading assignments or the ordering of the readings. The assignments, policies, course goals, and grading, however, will not change.

Schedule: The American Metaphysical Cosmopolis: Transcendentalism, Asian Mysticism and the Spiritual Republic

WEEK 1

Mon: Discussion of course

Wed: Discussion

Fri: Discussion of Metaphysical Religion

WEEK 2

Mon (August 27): "Introduction" in Schmidt's *Restless Souls*

Wed: Emerson and the Transcendentalists. Read Schmidt Chapter 1

Fri: Schmidt Chapter 2

WEEK 3

Mon (Sept 3): **Labor Day: NO CLASS**

Wed: Read Schmidt Chapter 3

Fri: Read selections from Emerson: "Harvard Divinity School Address" and "Oversoul" (online).

WEEK 4

Mon (Sept 10): Read Schmidt Chapter 4

Wed: Short reading available online: Metaphysical Asia

Fri: Section from *Radical Spirits*

WEEK 5

Mon (Sept 17): Spiritualism. Read Albanese pp 206-233 – available online

Wed: Read Schmidt Chapter 5

Fri: Discussion

WEEK 6

Mon (Sept 24): Spiritualism transformed through the prisms of science and magic. Read Albanese pp 259-283.

Wed: Read Schmidt Chapter 6

Fri: Read Schmidt Epilogue

WEEK 7
ESALEN: AMERICA AND THE RELIGION OF NO RELIGION

Mon: (Oct 1) The Empowerment of the Founders, read: Kripal, 3-69

Wed: Psychological Countercultures
read: Kripal, 69-83

Fri 83-112

WEEK 8
Mon (Oct 8): Read Kripal, Superpowers of the mind, 113-180

Wed: Excerpt on mysticism and the paranormal

Fri: *Five page reflection on metaphysical religion due

WEEK 9

Mon (Oct 15): Somatics and the Cosmic Womb, read: Kripal, 222-269

Wed: Video clips

Friday: Discussion

WEEK 10

Mon (Oct 22): Super Powers and Darwin's Dream
read: Kripal, 291-357

Wed: Video clips and short online reading

Fri: Discussion

Week 11
Mon (Oct 29): The Religion of No Religion, read: Kripal 357- 425

Wed: The Mystical Idea of "America" read: Kripal, 449-468

Fri: Discuss research projects

WEEK 12

Mon (Nov 5): The Future of the Past and the Metphysical Idea of 'America', read: Kripal 449-469

Wed: Discuss independent research and readings for last quarter of semester

Fri: The problem of disenchantment and theories of re-enchantment. Read chapters 3 and 5 in Christopher Partridge's *The Re-Enchantment of the West* (online).

WEEK 13

Mon (Nov 12) – TBD

Wed – **Submit potential paper topic by email**. 1 page outline of your topic and a preliminary biography. Schedule meeting with instructor for first week of December.

Friday: NO CLASS

WEEK 14

Mon (Nov 19)

Wed: Thanksgiving weekend NO CLASS

Fri: NO CLASS

WEEK 15

Mon (Nov 26): **Schedule individual meetings with instructor concerning term papers.**

Wed: TBD Workshop Papers

Fri: Workshop Papers

WEEK 16

Mon (Dec 3rd): Workshop Papers

Wed: Workshop Papers

Fri: Last class

FINAL PAPER DUE: December 17th, 11:59pm.